DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 029 754 RE 001 721

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Diagnosis for the Classroom Teacher.

Pub Date Apr 68

Note-10p.; Paper presented at College Reading Association conference, Knoxville, April 4-6, 1968

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60

Descriptors-Achievement Tests, Classroom Observation Techniques, Corrective Reading, *Diagnostic Teaching, *Elementary School Teachers, *Reading Diagnosis, *Reading Instruction, *Reading Tests, Standardized Tests

The role of the classroom teacher as a diagnostician is described. Since the purpose of reading diagnosis is to ascertain the probable potential of each student and to determine what his instructional needs are and where to begin instruction, extensive individual testing is neither possible nor recommended for the classroom teacher. However, reading expectancy, self concept, and motivation can be determined from teacher observation and school record analysis. Also, the best instrument available to the classroom teacher for obtaining information about groups of children is the standardized test. The uses, advantages, and disadvantages of a group standardized test for screening and grouping pupils are discussed. Some guidelines for analyzing and comparing subtest scores to obtain diagnostic information and for interpreting test behavior are given. (CM)

ED029754

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Apr '68

DIAGNOSIS FOR THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

There is a kind of mystique about the word "diagnosis." It sounds complicated. It sounds expensive. Yet its origin indicates that it simply means "to know more." Stripped of its aura we recognize diagnosis as an integral part of any teaching-learning sttuation. It is not something restricted to failures. Nor is it confined to a Medical Center or a Reading Clinic. It is a purposeful attempt to ascertain the probable potential the individual has, to hypothesize why he is where he is, and to indicate what are some first steps to be taken in order that this individual may achieve increased competency and satisfaction from learning.

Today we are concerned with the classroom teacher as a diagnostician. We will focus on instruments and ways suitable to accomplish her particular goals. The classroom teacher is in a position to flexibly modify plans, so there is no need for exhaustive testing. This has an advantage with disabled youngsters. What they want is instant help. Testing to them is just accumulating more evidence that merely confirms what they already know--They can't read. For these and others the classroom teacher is primarily concerned with a place to start.

She does not have the time to do extensive individual testing. The measures she uses must yield the most information in the least time and be of such a nature as can be administered and interpreted with a moderate amount of training.

RE 001 721

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Diagnosis, to be efficient, must lead to remediation. For the classroom teacher such plans have to focus on handling a number of children at one time yet she must make the greatest effort to meet individual needs through flexible grouping and judicious use of pertinent materials. It is a large order. The teacher of the self-contained classroom has the possibility of being able to provide remedial and compensatory teaching in all that happens to the child during the day. The combination of understanding and functional application all day long can offset some of the advantages of concentrated tutorial sessions.

The first diagnostic instrument the teacher has at hand is professional judgment. She knows the environment from which her children come and its general effect on the educational aspirations of the child. She has cumulative folders through which she can gain background information. I personally am a little wary of extensive use of cumulative folders as starting points. Sometimes, as much as anything, they reflect teacher bias. Yet they are useful to go back to afterwards to determine trends, or perhaps see to what extent absences may be a factor. Usually cumulative folders offer clues as to what someone thinks the child has done rather than why.

One of the first things usually available to a classroom teacher is a roster of the grade to which she can add such information as sex, age, and the results of latest I.Q. testing. The ratio of boys to girls is important. A preponderance of boys usually results in more

big muscle activity and hopefully more vigor. It may also mean the possibility of more reading problems. The classroom teacher, above the beginning primary level, knows that common interests are more likely to be determined by sex as opposed to achievement levels.

School entrance is mainly determined by chronological age. It is a poor criterion, because it doesn't seem to work well. Retention is the most usual way of handling those what do not seem to measure up. As a result, in the average sixth grade classroom in the United States about 20 percent of the children will have repeated at least one grade. Retention without a specific program aimed at helping the child overcome his deficits is ineffectual. So the classroom teacher must be aware of such children and recognize some diagnostic features. If the child still is an active part of the classroom, chances are he is surviving not on knowledge or proficiency but on common sense. He is using what he has gained from having lived longer rather than having understood basic skills involved. As a result his comprehension scores may be inflated by his ability to work the angles rather than demonstrate acquired skill. On the other hand, he may have bits and pieces of knowledge that are nebulous and non-contributing to his well being, but which, if tried together, may provide for rapid growth.

Motivation is an important consideration. How actively involved are these youngsters in learning? Do they come to school with interest, enthusiasm, and hope? If so, this will give an extra thrust to what they can accomplish. Are they listless, sullen, passive, withdrawn?

If the answer is "yes," then the teacher may expect less than any paper and pencil estimate she may initially make, for she will realize that the first group will not be daunted by difficulty; the second is threatened by failure. Psychology says there will be no learning if there is no obstacle between the learner and the goal. But that obstacle, to be efficient, varies with the learner. The child with little hope cannot cope with as great an obstacle as the child who has repeated successes under his belt. The classroom teacher can do that which she does well--watch. On the basis of periodic observations focusing on selected children, shy can form conclusions.

To what extent does the child

1. guess reasonably, rashly, not all?
2. to be an active group member or be withdrawn, passive
3. work independently or "lean" on someone else
4. follow directions
5. show interest and intellectual curiosity
6. demonstrate originality, humor

I.Q. as a measure of intelligence is related to ultimate success in reading. Intelligence is something that can't really be measured directly. We know it can vary, and is affected by environment, health, and other things. Yet we measure. Group intelligence tests are not as reliable as certain individual measures, but chances are group results are what the teacher has. If the test was administered less than two years ago, she can use it with confidence, to get some estimate of

expected reading achievement. All the while she will be quite aware that measures of general tendency may obscure the real conditions of the class.

Up to this point the teacher has considered sex, environment, age, motivation, and reading expectancy. The latter can be determined by various means (yrs. in school x IQ + 1). What she is essentially concerned with is how well are they reading?

Since teachers are primarily concerned with groups of children, I suggest the best instrument to supply some answers is a standardized test. It is my opinion that teachers do not get all the available information possible. They look at the results and are either unnecessarily enthused or depressed. They recognize that halfway through the fifth grade, for example, the class average should be 5.5. But then they translate that as the poorest any in their grade should achieve. If that is the expected average, then some are expected, (50 percent of the class) to fall below that, and 50 percent above. As the norms were developed by the test makers, the scores were expected to extend over a six-year range.

Since we are going to lean heavily for diagnosis on an achievement test, let's face some facts concerning them. What are some things they are useful for:

They are excellent for screening

To compare a given group with another group

To compare this group with national norms (local norms would be more useful)

To separate groups from each other

To offer a type of gauge when selecting material

What are some assets?

They are objective

They are usually carefully constructed

They require less time than some other measures

They require less skill on the part of the teacher

But:

They do tend to over-rate in that the score is a composite of all a youngster knew plus all he could guess

They test sustained attention over a short period of time

They are tests of aided recall where most items are based on reading for detail

They represent a threatening situation

Most "survey" tests yield separate scores on vocabulary and comprehension. The total reading score is an average of the two. At this point teachers are sometimes puzzled because there is great discrepancy between the two sub-tests. Which should be used to determine skill level? At Memphis State Reading Center when we have sought to place children rapidly into instructional groups, we have found the combination of the two with modification yields almost the same results as the more time-consuming informal reading inventory.

Another word of caution in regard to standardized tests. The grade score, with its decimal point, gives a spurious air of precision and is sometimes confusing. Percentile scores may be more useful in telling the teacher where the youngster would be in any group of 100 students of the particular grade level.

Since the standardize tests results represents all the child knew plus what he could guess, the level achieved, is really nearer his frustration level. What the teacher wants is his instructional level, where the child, with her help, can cope with the vocabulary and sentence length, and yet have energy to concentrate on skill growth. At the intermediate level, my guess is that his achievement test score will be inflated by one year. In our experience it is less at the primary level and frequently more at the secondary level. Deducting the appropriate amount from the achievement score, the teacher can get a first estimate of the instructional levels.

But what they seem like on paper and what they do in class are two different things. At this point she needs to refer back to her estimate of self-concept and motivation. Psychologically it is better to slightly under estimate instructional level and adjust upward soon rather than place the child too high and have to move him downward.

Translating the results into conventional reading levels the teacher now has a fairly good idea of her grouping within her grade. Starting the children in appropriate material at a level where they can succeed, she can move them forward if she teaches them. These group

suggestions should be flexible and may need to be revised soon, but having decided at what level, she now asks herself what skill did the youngster use in order to get his test score? A consideration of the sub-tests is in order.

One sub-test is Vocabulary. In this case the word in question was given in a phrase. The phrase was helpful only in that it revealed what part of speech was involved. The child selected from four or five choices. Not much reading was involved, but neither were there any extra clues and the meaning supplied might not be the meaning the child had for this word.

In the comprehension sub-test he had to read paragraphs of varying length. A series of questions followed. Some involved main idea, inference, important detail, or sequence. In this task the other words helped out.

If the score was appreciably higher on vocabulary, perhaps the child can do better if he does not need to mo much reading. Here the task may be one or recognizing a word or identifying a detail. Interrelationships between words are not stressed, but word recognition skills are. Carefulness and accuracy pays off. He may be a word-by-word reader and in this limited task will not be handicapped by his lack of phrasing.

What such a youngster needs may be much easy reading to build sight vocabulary, phrasing which improves speed of comprehension, practice in reading for the main idea, some stress on the use of context. He may benefit from special exposure to words with multiple meanings.

If his score in comprehension is much greater, chances are he used context clues. He may have guessed at what he didn't know and was able to profit from the fact that there were more clues in the longer paragraphs. He was better at identifying the general idea than he was at giving painstaking attention to details. Usually these youngsters are more able although older youngsters will use common sense and do well.

In general, such a youngster needs some stress on careful accurate reading. He may be deficient in word attack skills since he seems to be over-relying on one, so he may need emphasis on syllabication, phonics, and structural analysis. He needs to learn to distinguish essential fron non-essential detail. He also may need to learn to control the tendency for habitual bluffing. He may be compensating for poor work habits by rashness and haste.

Sometimes the child who is a slow worker can be identified. He will get right most of the items that he has time to do and will not be handicapped if the test has generous time limits. This child has a short recognition span, makes many fixations, and frequently moves his whole head as he progresses across the page.

In this task of trying to decide how the youngster achieved the score he did, one generally comes across two more types. One youngster picks and chooses. He will choose according to the content--avoiding science if it's a girl, choosing it if it's a boy, selecting the shorter passages if he is test wise. The second type if the impulsive,

rash youngster who guesses wildly. He may mark more items than any other child. In a way, he is like the context reader in that his score will largely reflect his ability to work with minimal clues and his procedures will encompass daring and impulsiveness. The wise teacher will be aware of all these things. During the test while the children work, she circulates making notes about each child and how he meets this challenge, how he copes with this threatening situation.

If there is at least 3/4 of a year's difference between the vocabulary and comprehension scores, it may be considered significant for that is usually beyond the standard error for the test.

At this point if the teacher feels the need for more information, standardized diagnostic tests may be of help. But she needs to realize the word "Diagnostic" in the title may not be true.

Actually the kind of teaching that continuously assesses in order not to waste time on what a child already knows but yet provides re-exposure for that which did not take the first time. It is hard to beat the sensitive, knowledgeable classroom teacher as a diagnostician.